21:Huxley Q, T-5 (no date) 1960 FL11 Luo
Masai FL12

CHAPTER 10

Masai Herds and Mara Lions

I

THE Masai have won respect by their contempt for civilization and all that it has offered them. For half a century Europeans have been tempting them with all the material bribes, indeed even non-material ones, for which every Bantu and Nilotic people is avid. There is scarcely an African of the fat lands who would not sell his soul for a school certificate. The Masai have rejected school certificates with a proud and lofty disdain.

Will a certificate fatten a bullock or swell the belly of a cow? Masai hearts are with their cattle; they desire no finer destiny for a son than to walk in the dust of a larger herd than his father's. The young man who dreams of glory sees fine white bulls and brindled cows and green grass knee-high, he does not see the stone bungalow, the shining motor-car, the well-cut suit, the framed diploma so alluring to his darker fellow-countrymen. He likes to wear his hair in matted pigtails smeared with red ochre and rancid butter, to stand with one foot against the other knee, to eat a compound of bullock's blood and curdled milk, to carry his long spear and to keep his women in their beads and coils and fly-infested mud burrow as his ancestors did—those ancestors whose lion head-dresses and painted shields filled the hearts of lesser breeds with terror, and won the right of conquest over the steppes of eastern Africa from their northern Somali deserts to their southern tsetse bush.

For the Masai have pride, and pride is a quality we recoil from in ourselves and half-admire, half-deplore in others. An Englishman today must stamp with the hob-nail boots of equality upon the little shoots of pride that cannot help but spring up in his heart; but when he sees the fine, free growth of it in others, an envious respect attacks him. For

21:Huxley Q, T-5 (no date) 1960 FL11 Luo
Masai FL12

numbering about 85,000; keep about one million head of scrub cattle, and 660,000 sheep and goats. They *could* export fat steers and lambs, but have done next to nothing to improve the quality of their animals. This is because they do not need the cash. There are old men living in mud hovels with little but ear-rings, a spear and a blanket who could at any minute realize several thousand pounds for their cattle. Scarcely one of them could not afford a motor-car if he wanted one, probably a Jaguar at that. The plain fact is they do not want motor-cars, or beds, or kitchen sinks, or radios, or refrigerators, or washing machines: they just want cattle, which they have, and which the processes of nature will increase for them without their having to do any disagreeable work.

It is an *impasse*. The whole machinery of modern society, modern trade, modern development, has been halted by the Masai's refusal to keep up with the Jones's, or the Kamaus in this case. It is like a great Britannia aircraft grounded by a midge in the works. Modern civilization runs on avarice as cars on petrol, and if there is no pump where you can fill up with avarice, you simply stay where you are.

But even the Masai are not really free of avarice: it merely takes a different form. If they do not want bicycles and trousers, they do want more cattle, and this has led them into a great error. Instead of rejecting everything the West offered them, they accepted the hypodermic syringe of the vets. First of all the vets put an end to rinderpest, and then, rather less successfully, dealt with various other diseases that were keeping their herds in check.

No doubt it would have needed superhuman self-denial on the part of the Masai to have rejected this magical means of ending the periodic epidemics that had wiped out all but a rump of their cherished herds. Yet these were the means by which nature had kept herds and habitat in balance. Vegetation, controlled by constant factors like rainfall and soil structure, cannot multiply as creatures of the animal kingdom can, and do. The fact remains that to accept the vet's syringe was fatal to the Masai, and to offer it to them, as the Government did, without also insisting upon some means of keeping down the livestock population, was an act of remarkable

21:Huxley Q, T-5 (no date) 1960 FL11 Luo
Masai FL12

imbecility—or perhaps not remarkable, since nothing has been more characteristic of the half-century of European intervention in Africa than the slap-happy introduction of bright, well-meaning ideas by enthusiasts of all kinds, without any regard for their long-term consequences.

Anyway, vets controlled diseases, livestock multiplied and their hoofs and mouths destroyed the precarious grass cover of the plains. The result is that, except where the tsetse fly remains in control, the Masai are living in country poised upon the edge of deserthood. Some of it has gone over the edge, some hovers on the borderline, some has not reached it yet. And so pressure mounts upon those regions that are still protected by the tsetse fly.

Overcrowded people outside want to get in, overstocked Masai themselves want to take their herds where grazing is still rich and deep. If either succeed, unless they adopt very different methods, they will destroy those regions as surely as they have damaged their present inheritance. Agricolas and vets do not want to see these last remaining areas opened up without strict control. But governments are terrified of controlling anyone by what may be represented as harsh measures, and administrators have inclined to caution since the Masai speared to death a D.C. who was persuading them to sell some steers. So the matter, like many others, rests in a state of suspended flux, and everyone hopes for good rains.

III

Down on the Kenya–Tanganyika border, not so very long ago, there lived an Englishman who kept in touch with the world by carrier-pigeon. For three or four months of the year no vehicle could reach him, and even in the dry weather it was a long, hard, bumpy seventy-mile journey from Narok, where the road ends. The aeroplane has changed all that. An hour's pleasant flight from Nairobi brought us comfortably to rest beside a tributary of the Mara river.

First we flew over the Mau, that range of mountains forming the south-western wall of the Rift Valley. Covered with forests of cedars and olives and, higher up, of bamboos, the

21:Huxley Q, T-5 (no date) 1960 FL11 Luo
Masai FL12

133 Mau is the source of all the rivers watering the western half
[137] of Masailand, Kipsigis and part of the Rift Valley. The birth-
place of innumerable streams, it is, in theory, protected by its
status as a forest reserve.

● 185 Looking out from the small yellow aircraft expertly handled
311 by June Wright, one of the best commercial pilots in East
Africa, one could quickly see how different theory was from
practice, here as elsewhere. In a forest reserve no one is
allowed to fell trees, cultivate, start fires or graze livestock.
In less than half an hour, I counted seventeen active fires and
saw the shambles created by innumerable others. Whole
ridgebacks of the mountain, sticking up like black spines, were
as bare as slag-heaps and already runnelled and creased by
gully erosion. Older fires were still smoking in some of these
devastated areas; one could see the forest being eaten into
like a great fur pelt attacked by moths.

As sure as fate, one day there will be no more water for
cattle in the streams below. 'God is punishing us,' will say the
Masai: but it will not be God, it will be themselves. The
[233] streams are already shrinking and the Masai are driving their
herds farther into the hills to find grazing. They cannot take
cattle into forest and so they burn a way in. They are creeping
upwards, spreading destruction as they go in order to escape
the consequences of destruction they have already caused.

[222] Other fires are started by honey-hunters who burn down
trees to smoke out the bees. Often, in the forest, you can see
blackened hollow cedars and olives killed by fires tucked into
the roots. If the foliage is dry and the wind right, the fire
will spread and get out of hand.

563 And then there are 'accepters': a clumsy term given to men
of other tribes who are settling in Masailand, family by
family, with the permission of Masai elders. They are tenants:
but it is very unlikely that they will ever go.

[167] In South Nyanza and in Kipsigis it is reckoned that upwards
of two thousand families a year are crossing the southern
border into Masailand and Tanganyika. In recent years a
[582] good many Masai have married Kikuyu or Kamba wives
[842] because so many of their own women are sterile; at one time
there was quite a trade in Kikuyu girl-children, exchanged for
Cattle.